The biography of Jim Giancarlo paints a portrait of the artist from a very early age. His boyhood fascination with producing neighborhood shows, his immersion in visual arts at SUNY Buffalo, his ongoing aspiration to be a writer—all were father to the multi-talented man who speculated recently, “Maybe the Creator’s plan is no plan at all. Maybe ‘He’ just loves creating beauty.”

The counter-cultural pull of San Francisco drew Jim west after college and unveiled what would become his primary medium. On a whim, he tagged along to a friend’s dance class, and the experience produced a full-body epiphany. To borrow the words with which he later described the appeal of Tango: dance would allow him “to surrender to the fire and the light,” to become one with “panthers and gods.” Soon he had helped found Trenchmouth Musical Productions, an avant-garde, drag-based troupe, for which zany lyrics and wildly imaginative choreography began to pour out of him.

It must have come as shock to his sensibilities when he arrived in Ashland in 1976 to join the Tudor dancers and buckle down to the traditional figures and dress of the old OSF Green Shows! He kept one foot outside the box, though, by living part-time in Seattle, where, in addition to theatre work, he managed a costume shop in Pike Place Market and practiced Masquerade Therapy—i.e., encouraging others to embrace their alter egos through dressing up.

As his reputation grew, so did his bond with Ashland. He choreographed numerous pieces for Oregon Dance Theatre, The Threepenny Opera for the Shakespeare Festival, and Grease for the Britt. It was during the latter production, packed with local talent, that the idea for the Oregon Cabaret Theatre was born. In 1986, with Jim as Artistic Director, its first show, Dames at Sea, rechristened the Old Pink Church. In the years since, Jim produced over 135 shows. He directed and/or choreographed more than 100, wrote fifteen, and performed in five!

But no summary of his considerable accomplishments can begin to capture Jim’s extraordinary spirit. Jim’s long-time friend and dancing partner Suzanne Seiber has called him a collaboragist for his ability in both art and life to bring together disparate elements and find a harmonious balance among them. May this collage of behind-the-scenes glimpses further convey his unique genius: Jim and Suzanne collaborate on a dance routine. He’s the marathoner; she sprints. She wants to quit, start over from scratch. He never doubts that what they have so far will come together exactly right in the end. It does.
In Seattle, Jim convinces a friend to audition with him in cat costumes for a serious, LORT production of *The King and I*. They offer a falsetto performance of “We Are Siamese.” They are not awarded parts.

Jim gives up a lifelong habit of bumming rides, buys a used Nissan, and learns to drive. His Ashland sister-in-law has given birth to twins boys, and he plans to take an active role in their care. He’ll need a way to get around.

Jim and movie buddy John Stadelman sit in the Ashland Cinema critiquing a bad action film *sotto voce*. During one interminable pursuit on wheels, Jim mutters, “Cut from the chase, cut from the chase.”

Jim and his cast are making up the pantomime *Cindy-rella* as they go along—all contributions are welcome. Tamara Marston focuses on making Jim laugh. One of her lines succeeds. “We’re keeping that one, right?” she asks. A wistful shake of the head. “No, Tami. This isn’t San Francisco.”

Jim gives countless young performers their first professional gig, paying them decent wages, finding them housing, earning countless tributes like this: “I would not be where I am now if it weren’t for Jim.”

Jim takes off on a spontaneous solo road-trip this past spring. He writes: “Dozens of times I round a curve and shout BEAUTIFUL! at a stunning new vista....I am on the move. I am gathering it all in. I am remembering my past, dreaming my future. I am trying to absorb the late Spring lushness to store it up and save it for the scorching, drought-dry Summer ahead.”

A post-it note is found inside Jim’s laptop after his death with his words: “Quiet the mind. Open the heart. Allow the soul. All is well. Surrender. Whatever happens is right.”

**ASHLAND NEW PLAYS FESTIVAL**

In its twenty-third season, Ashland New Plays Festival promises that ANPF 2014 will offer the most entertaining and edifying program yet. To kick off the nine-day-long celebration, on Friday, October 17, OSF’s Dan Donohue will be interviewed by John Rose for a Theatre Talk. The event will take place at 310 Oak Street, Ashland, and tickets are moving fast.

From October 22 through October 26, readings of the four selected plays will rotate in matinee and evening performances. *A Little Quid Pro Quo*, by Bob Clyman and directed by local favorite John Stadelman, sets a lawyer in competition with a philosopher over an issue of moral integrity. In *The Groser*, by James Harmon Brown and directed by returning hero Kenneth Albers, a recipe for family dysfunction is seasoned with connections to the Holocaust. Returning heroine, Catherine Lynn Davis, directs *Irreversible*, by Jack Karp, which dramatizes Robert Oppenheimer’s fateful choice to pursue his nuclear bomb. In *Homecoming*, by Michael Edan and directed by OSF actor Barzin Akhavan, an Iraq veteran with PTSD connects with his father, a Vietnam vet with PTSD.

**Added bonus:** At 10 am on Saturday, October 25, host playwright EM Lewis will conduct a workshop on the topic of “All our Yesterdays,” in which participants will explore strategies for bringing history—global or personal—to the stage. Email info@aslandnewplays.org with questions.

Molly Tinsley taught literature and creative writing at the U. S. Naval Academy for twenty years. Her latest book is the spy thriller *Broken Angels* (www.fuzepublishing.com).

Let us not be left with nothing but book-condors, book-tigers, book-elephants, slowly turning to dust in our hands. Let us learn from Martha’s lonely life and lonely death. Let us choose to keep the world alive.

**A frequent contributor to the Jefferson Monthly, High Country News, and other publications, Pepper Trail is an Ashland naturalist, writer, and photographer. He is the ornithologist at the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory, and in his spare time leads natural history expeditions around the world.**